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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Second session
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Agenda item 3
Theme of the session: "Indigenous children and youth"

Chairperson's summary of the high-level panel and dialogue on indigenous children and youth

Panel members

1. Nina Pacari Vega, Foreign Minister of Ecuador, introduced the high-level panel, noting the importance of identity and the movement of indigenous peoples out of the social arena and into the political arena. She discussed the issues faced by indigenous peoples, including racism, discrimination and marginalization. She noted that the international decade had not reached its goals and that it was necessary to consider a second decade. Recognizing and respecting indigenous identities, languages and traditional knowledge would give strength to indigenous peoples. Indigenous children and youth must be involved in the formation of policies which affected them. She emphasized that the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues should work to make the rights of the child the reality of indigenous children and youth.

2. Jaap Doek, Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, discussed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 30) and noted that it was almost the same as article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, with one important difference — article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically mentioned the indigenous child. The Committee paid particular attention to the rights of indigenous children, who often experienced discrimination in educational and social services in general. It would hold an indigenous children's day on 19 September 2003 in Geneva. The objectives of the special day were to develop policies and programmes for the consideration of the international and national communities. Mr. Doek called for a second decade of action.

3. Ida Nicolaisen noted that members had made indigenous children a high priority for the second session. Protecting indigenous children and youth was about protecting the future of humankind — they constituted a "fund of opportunity". She noted that indigenous young people were resourceful and there was an obligation to remove structural barriers which hampered that future. The issue of indigenous youth cut across all the mandates areas of the Forum, requiring cooperation between

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United Nations agencies. She noted the need for disaggregated data on young indigenous people to allow the Forum, the United Nations system and Governments to identify bottlenecks and to form a strategy for the elimination of obstacles. She urged the World Bank, which possessed a treasure of disaggregated data, to take a lead, in cooperation with other relevant United Nations agencies, in producing country-specific reports, which would be most useful and provide examples of the interface between indigenous children and structural obstacles. Ms. Nicolaisen noted the increasing migration (urbanization) of indigenous young people to cities, with all the problems that went with that. She recommended that a study be conducted by the United Nations system of legal frameworks and social programmes which focused on the urban indigenous child. She would welcome the appointment by the World Intellectual Property Organization of a good-will ambassador of indigenous children and youth. A considerable part of the Earth's rich cultural heritage was held in trust by indigenous peoples. For the world to preserve that, young indigenous people must be given a chance to follow their cultural ways.

4. Elizabeth Garret, a representative of indigenous youth, noted that the rights of the indigenous child were protected when the rights of indigenous peoples were protected. Indigenous youth had heeded the experience of their predecessors in the United Nations system and had become familiar with the various human rights instruments. Youth participation was limited by the lack of consistent funding for participation in both national and international arenas. She noted that indigenous youth were currently playing an advisory role with the United Nations Environment Programme. Data collection was still an outstanding problem concerning indigenous youth. Indigenous youth should have priorities in culturally appropriate education and training. Mentoring by experienced elders and other youth was a useful support strategy for young indigenous peoples. She noted that the United States of America and Somalia remained the only United Nations Member States that had not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and expressed the hope that they would do so. Capacity-building and the recognition of self-determination were strategies for addressing indigenous youth's futures.

5. Nils Kastberg (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) underlined that indigenous children and youth were marginalized in many of the protections afforded to others. They were often hidden in statistics of national averages. The right to non-discrimination and other rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child must be a reality for the indigenous child. Children had rights to a protective environment, equity in access to basic services and participation in society. UNICEF had as a core to its work the principle of non-discrimination, and noted that much greater efforts were required to make a difference.

6. Lee Swepston (the International Labour Organization (ILO)) spoke about the worst forms of child labour and other factors that severely impacted indigenous children. The ILO took a rights-based approach. ILO Convention No. 169 also specifically referred to indigenous children in articles 26, 27, 28 and 29. Indigenous realities were rarely captured in non-disaggregated data.

7. Jones Kyazze (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) noted that for UNESCO, indigenous peoples issues were cross-cutting and went to the core of UNESCO's work on culture, social and human sciences and upholding human rights. Education was one of the major aims of the

international decade of the world's indigenous peoples and one of the chief platforms of UNESCO.

8. Jackie Simms (World Health Organization (WHO)) spoke about the indigenous children's environmental health issues. Household water, sanitation, and internal and external pollution were the environmental risks to the indigenous child. Those were multiple risks and must be tackled where children spent most of their time — in the home and the school. Indigenous children and indigenous communities were especially at risk because of a lack of community infrastructure and access to basic services, especially fresh water, sanitation and adequate housing. The future involvement of the indigenous child relied on them having good health immediately.

Forum members

9. Marcos Matias Alonso underlined that the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols should be ratified by all nations. He noted emerging issues, such as child labour, which had become another form of slavery. Conflicts producing indigenous refugees and immigrants contributed to the vulnerability of the indigenous child. He expressed with concern the use of child soldiers and others who became the victims of sexual and physical abuse. The right to education and health were still denied to many indigenous children. He recommended the establishment of an inter-agency programme to address indigenous children's issues. He noted that the advances made for indigenous children by various Member States should also be recognized.

10. Willie Littlechild stressed the importance of sports and physical development and play, which were part of education and included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ms. Mililani Trask asked UNICEF for advice on how to refine current data collection by UNICEF for a more comprehensive analysis of the situation. Mrs. Qin noted the importance of youth to the future and noted that indigenous cultures could not be allowed to die out. She added that the Forum needed to strengthen the Forum's work with other agencies to ensure a broad cooperative approach. Ms. Njuma Ekundanayo added that work was being done with estimates rather than statistics because of the marginalization of indigenous peoples and the lack of disaggregated data. She noted that indigenous peoples were made into minorities by such things as wars, famine and disease, to name a few.

Member States

11. Mexico called for new ways of dealing with those issues — holistic complementary ways. Mexico also had failures in that area but there was a desire to move ahead in new ways. A number of Member States stressed the real desire to address indigenous children and youth issues in collaboration with indigenous peoples, and noted successful youth projects from various regions. A number of States also noted successes in areas of health and education and the need for good practices to be promoted. Brazil mentioned successful demographic recovery and Finland discussed the revitalization of language skills and use of culturally relevant curricula.

United Nations system

12. UNICEF noted the needs for Governments to collect the primary data on indigenous peoples, and the United Nations system needed to build on that. The ILO

noted that the United Nations system was looking at those issues in a collaborative fashion. UNESCO discussed the inclusion of indigenous youth in various UNESCO forums. WHO welcomed the inter-agency approach and the involvement of indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples organizations

13. Anna Pinto, Centre for Organization, Research and Education, noted that indigenous children suffered from the same issues as all children — but more so. Indigenous children were impacted in more severe ways. Globalization had also impacted indigenous children, promoting fast foods and ways of being that were not in harmony with indigenous beliefs. Too often, the money spent on good work was exceeded a thousand times over by the money spent on destruction of the environment and other negative things. Other indigenous speakers talked of disturbing rates of suicide (First Nations Canada); the overrepresentation of youth in detention; youth subject to sex trade (Elders Caucus); the murder of indigenous women (Women's Caucus, Canada); the need for youth to channel their energies and creative abilities into artistic activities (World Council of Churches); violence against indigenous peoples (COICA); children stolen (CISA); the great need for culturally sensitive education in the mother tongue; and such topics as substance abuse, cultural erosion and the need to ensure that indigenous young people had futures of opportunities. A representative from Canada spoke about the high incidence of foetal-alcohol syndrome among indigenous children, which was 300 per cent that of non-indigenous children. Indigenous youth suicide rates suggested that indigenous youth believed that they had more reason to die than to live. Many indigenous peoples organizations spoke about children and youth issues, including endemic health problems, substance abuse, family dysfunction, violence, overrepresentation in custody, youth suicide and culturally inappropriate education. Many also spoke about possible solutions, such as family-based youth support, employment opportunities and culturally appropriate service delivery in such areas as education, training and health. The Unity Rider and Run 2004, which would open the International Elders Summit, extended an open invitation for participation.

Summary

14. Ida Nicolaisen, Forum Member with a portfolio for indigenous children and youth, noted the necessity for cooperation and collaboration by the United Nations system, and emphasized the need for Governments not to compartmentalize and marginalize indigenous peoples. She also noted the inadequacy of the laws, programmes and funds available to address indigenous disadvantage, especially to address young peoples' issues, noting that they represented the future. She stressed the need for streamlining policies and focusing programmes on children and youth, respectively, and to facilitate the participation of adolescents in meetings. She also highlighted good work and good practices in youth support projects and indigenous appropriate education, and emphasized that such good work needed to be enhanced and accelerated.